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The War of 1939-1945

Jockeying for Position

When the European war broke out in September, 1939, the conditions in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia were not dissimilar. In each country a semi-dictatorial government, primarily responsible to the monarch, ruled with the assent of a subservient parliament. The predominantly agrarian masses were discontented with both political and economic conditions but were inarticulate and ineffectively organized. While all former political parties had been officially dissolved, their members continued to carry on a half-concealed activity beneath the eyes of the censor and the political police. The economy of each country was tied, in the main, to Germany's; although in Bulgaria, Great Britain and France made a pretense at counteracting German influences, they had apparently abandoned Yugoslavia to the Axis. In foreign relations both governments officially pursued a policy of neutrality, while their ministers and rulers made open or surreptitious visits to Hitler or his henchmen. German "tourists" ceaselessly worked in each country for the benefit of the German Reich.

Beneath the surface, however, there were forces which caused Bulgaria and Yugoslavia to take different courses when the crucial test came. In Yugoslavia resistance to collaboration with the Axis sprang up the minute the government capitulated. In Bulgaria, on the other hand, the government was able to swing the country into the Axis camp and keep it there until the triumph of the United Nations and particularly Russia made it clear that the Axis was losing the war.

As late as February, 1940, the Bulgarian government[5] assured the members of the Balkan Entente that it would not press its revisionist claims while the war lasted. With the dismemberment of Romania, however, in the summer of 1940, Bulgaria considered itself absolved of this pledge and in September obtained Southern Dobruja, thus regaining the boundary of 1912. Although Romania and Hungary were persuaded in November to adhere to the Tripartite Pact of Germany, Italy, and Japan, and despite the fact that over 80 per cent of Bulgaria's trade was now being carried on with Germany, the tsar and his government refused to join the Axis. Russia, whose agreement with the Reich in August, 1939, had undoubtedly helped to confuse the Bulgarian people, may have had something to do

[5] In well-managed elections, January, 1940, the government obtained a *sobranje* composed of 140 supporters and 20 opponents of whom 9 were Communists. A new government, organized on February 16, was headed by Bogdan Filov who remained premier until he entered the Regency Council in September, 1943.

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Dragalevtsy. In general, though the division of labor was traditional, the specialization of occupation was increasing. Though unemployment was absent from the village, this in no way implied that all had the kind of work they wanted. It was astounding enough that even in times of world depression all did have a way of earning a living.

In Bulgaria, as in most countries, property passed from parent to child. There too the laws governing this transfer were very complicated. However, as a general principle in the villages sons inherited twice as much land as daughters. Usually the sons received equal amounts, but a father while still alive could divide the land, taking an equal share for himself, which he later gave to his favorite son. Quite often a sister said when the time of division arrived: "Why should I take land away from my brothers?" and forfeited her claim. In some cases she would sell her share of the estate cheaply to a favorite brother. If she was married, however, her husband could insist that she take what was her due and might even go to court to pursue the case. Every year there were a few Dragalevtsy people involved in long-drawn-out lawsuits originating over the division of inherited land. More often than not, lawyers' fees used up a great part of the value of the property.

A heavy inheritance tax accompanied any such transfer of property from the father to his children. One man at work in the hayfield took time off to tell me of the arrangement being worked out in his family:

"Our father, who is still living, told us three brothers to divide his property equally among us. We have not made the division officially as yet, because if we did we would have to pay an inheritance tax amounting to about four hundred dollars. We divide the land by lot. We take strips of land, both meadows and fields of equal value, and draw lots for the strips. Of course, our father has kept some of the land for himself, but we shall divide that among the three of us after his death."

The most serious conflicts in the village arose when there was disagreement over the division of a patrimony. Brother turned against brother, and whole families became involved in the dispute. There

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was also conflict over the location of boundary stones. At first I could scarcely believe my eyes when I was shown how the peasants distinguished their fields. Taking some landmark such as a tree, a bend in the road, or a stream, the peasants marked off their strips by small piles of stone. Fences and hedgerows were impracticable because the strips were too small to justify the expense of enclosure. Since every farmer possessed several strips, possibilities of conflict over the boundaries were numerous. The wonder is that there was so little trouble, in view of the fact that every foot of the strip must be utilized if the farmer was to make any profit.

Animals too proved a source of dispute. The oxen, for instance, strayed into an unprotected field and did considerable damage to the growing crop. The person incurring loss often took the matter to the mayor for trial in his magistrate's court. Once an effort was made to have all funds collected from such disputes turned over to the local *Chitalishte,* or Library Association, but this received little public support. For some time there was very bad feeling between the shepherds and the dairymen over the question of pasturage. The *Obshtina,* or local government, passed an ordinance that grazing should be done on one's own land and the common pasture abolished. The shepherds, accustomed to roaming over a considerable area in a day's time, were violently opposed to the new measure; those possessing five or six head of cattle naturally favored it.

Other types of conflict also arose over animals. The widow Zdravka, in explaining to me why she was not on good terms with her neighbor Dimiter, brought another case of disagreement over livestock to my attention:

"Just before St. Peter's Day, Dimiter's dogs fell upon my sow as she passed his yard on her way home from pasture. The pig, which was to bear young the next day, became frightened and fell into a ditch. I immediately went to the veterinarian who told me that the pig's young would be stillborn, and sure enough, they were. I went to the priest and the mayor to ask for justice, but Dimiter told them that he didn't let his dogs out and the accident wasn't his fault. Since he was a man, nothing was done to him and I can't do anything about it myself."

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When I asked her if she and Dimiter had quarrels about other things, Zdravka answered:

"We don't quarrel for I keep quiet, and he only speaks to me 'between his teeth.'"

Poultry was a source of much ill feeling among neighbor women. Whenever a hen or rooster strayed into the garden next door there was apt to be a verbal battle, the effects of which fortunately wore off within a few days. There was one woman, however, who had not spoken to her next-door neighbor for three years because of harsh words uttered about a straying hen. "May her chickens be homeless," cursed the other person in describing the incident.

In case the women quarreled over such things as chickens, overhanging branches of a fruit tree, or the return of a borrowed article, the men were inclined to treat the whole incident lightly and speak of it as "woman's business." On the other hand, if two men had a serious dispute, their families behaved distantly toward each other, either because of actual antipathy or because of paternal command. From the standpoint of social interaction, therefore, a serious row between two men was more of a strain on the social structure than was a quarrel between two women. It was apt to last longer, involve more people, and have larger issues at stake.

A visit to the village courtroom convinced me that money was also the basis for much misunderstanding. The court records were full of cases of men who had argued over financial matters until one of them haled the other into court. Most of these disputes were settled by the mayor, but many people left his courtroom still dissatisfied. Because the Dragalevtsy peasant was penurious, every lev was cherished and spent only when absolutely necessary. Such frugality was a virtue from one point of view, but it became a vice when it led to disruptive conflict.

This increased emphasis upon money permeated even the family relationships. One woman exclaimed:

"Relatives don't even lend sewing machines to one another without payment. I have a sister-in-law who has a machine, but she won't let my daughters use it unless I pay."

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578 But day in and day out co-operation was much more common in the community than conflict. Conflict was more colorful, it varied the ordinary routine for participants and observers, and it brought to the surface many causes of minor irritation. The character of village life, however, called for continued interchange of labor, implements, and even work animals.

527 241 At breakfast one morning Bai Penko told me that I had better go down to the school meadows if I wanted to see something interesting. The dog days had come. The peasants would do no work of their own during three of these days because of their firmly rooted superstition that fire would later destroy whatever they did. If they should use these days for getting in their own hay, it would probably burn during the autumn. Some imaginative leader had taken advantage of this traditional idleness by proposing that every family send a member down to the school meadows to mow and stack the hay which was later to be sold for the benefit of the local school. The villagers obliged with the mental reservation that it was no concern of theirs if the school's hay burned before it could be sold to the commission merchants.

Even before I had finished my pale cocoa made of sheep's milk, some of the tavern faithful began to drift in. It was already hot outside, so hot that the men rejoiced because they did not have to go down to the meadow in the broiling sun. One patriarch had trouble persuading a daughter-in-law to represent the family, but she had agreed to go if he would buy her the pair of new shoes he had been promising her; another said his son wanted to go because he thought it would be more fun down there than hanging around the house. Such remarks as these spurred me on my way.

I had gone only a hundred yards before I caught up with a housewife headed for the meadow, a wooden pitchfork over her shoulder. She was not looking forward to the toil ahead of her, because she wanted to work in her vegetable garden, dog days or no dog days.

Even before I reached the group I saw them hard at work. Rows of men were wielding scythes, rhythmically and unhurriedly advancing together without leaving an erect blade of grass between them.

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individuals were celebrating their name days with appropriate hospitality. 796

Bulgarian children did not hang up their stockings on Christmas Eve but, if their parents were being influenced by modern ideas, did find a present or two at the foot of their bed when they woke up in the morning. They immediately ran to kiss the hands of their father and mother. They called Santa Claus *"Dedo Koleda,"* which meant "Grandfather Christmas." He did not wear a bright red, white-furred costume but had on a brown homespun outfit that corresponded more nearly to the peasant's manner of dress.

On these ceremonial occasions the father and mother presided [593] with quiet dignity over the celebrations. They were accorded every respect by their children. As the Christmases passed, the couple's feeling of partnership deepened. Each year left its accumulation of memories, about which husband and wife said little, but about which they could feel sure the other was thinking.

Christmas and the holidays that followed were only a prelude to [785] *Velikden*—literally, the Great Day—the day of Christ's resurrection. On the eighth Sunday before Easter, or *Mesni Zagovezni* (meat fast), all those who kept the long Easter fast stopped eating meat. The following Sunday was *Sirni Zagovezni* (cheese fast) after which those fasting gave up all milk products. This Sunday itself was a day of great feasting on all sorts of cheese products. On both Sundays fires were lit; on *Mesni Zagovezni* there was a great fire at night in the village square, and on *Sirni Zagovezni* almost every household lighted a fire in the yard around which the youngsters waved burning straw stuck in the cleft end of a stick and chanted an ancient couplet

Orata, Kopata!
Dai mi, chicho, momata

whose significance had vanished with the ages.

On this Sunday, and the three days preceding, all quarrels among 796 the villagers were settled, everyone visiting his neighbors and relatives 598 to beg pardon for real or fancied offenses. The quiet that reigned over the village on the evening of *Sirni Zagovezni* was little short of wonderful. At the break of day the children had risen to kiss their

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parents' hands and ask pardon for past misbehavior, and all day long there had been a wandering in and out of homes by men to meet some other men with whom they had been at odds, and by a handshake to ask pardon.

I came into the tavern late in the afternoon of that day. It was snowing heavily and the warmth from the stove felt good. Near me sat a man rubbing his chilled hands. After we had exchanged formal greetings, I asked him where he was going, the usual village question.

"I'm going back to my village, eleven miles farther on."

"Where have you been?"

"I've been over to Durvanitsa [two miles away] to visit my parents and beg their forgiveness."

"Have you had any trouble with your parents during the past year that would make you take such a long walk in such bad weather?"

Patient with me, a foreigner, he said, "No, I've had no troubles with my parents. I've been to visit them. That is the custom."

A little later he went out into the snow to resume his eleven-mile tramp back home. His heart was at ease, for he had fulfilled the age-old custom of *Sirni Nedelya* (Cheese Sunday).

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The Saturday following Cheese Sunday was *Todorovden* (the day of St. Theodore, patron saint of horses). Then the children stopped fasting, for their young bodies could not stand seven weeks of a milkless diet. Early in the morning they, together with some of the old people, took communion in the village church. Many of the young men visited the village of Gorna Banya, which had its *Subor* on *Todorovden*. There was a great deal of horseback riding and racing up and down the muddy village streets, in honor of St. Theodore and "to protect the horses from worms."

[777]

Eight days before Easter was the Saturday called *Lazarovden* (St. Lazarus's Day). *Lazarki* groups, consisting of six girls each, went from house to house to sing and dance, according to the villagers in honor of the resurrection of Lazarus. They were given coins and eggs by the peasants who believed that these girls would bring them good luck in the months to come.

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confronting anyone seeking a rational solution to the Balkan impasse back in 1945.

My visits to Dragalevtsy, however, were not for the purpose of involving myself in the weighty matters of Balkan politics. I simply wanted to see how the village had changed, but soon found that an understanding of political events was necessary to an interpretation of the present situation. This became further apparent when I discovered that the three most significant differences between 1937 and 1945 were heightened factionalism, an increased feeling of insecurity, and a shifting of the relative importance of village institutions. Each of these deserves further explanation.

The coming of Communism had fostered factionalism to a degree never before experienced in Dragalevtsy. That, in fact, was its chief sociological effect. During the times when political parties were flourishing with abandon in the late 1920's and early 1930's the competition between party members was more a recreational pursuit than serious political maneuvering. All parties had had considerable backing from their respective leaders in Sofia, and all to that extent were on a similar footing. With the coming of the Germans some villagers ardently supported Nazi ideology and considered Bulgaria fortunate to be allied with the Axis powers; others had their misgivings, but never to the point of splitting up the village on factional lines. Upon the formation of the opposition in 1945, matters were different. No longer was the political competition an internal affair alone, but was one in which outside powers took an active interest. The Communists openly boasted about the might of Russia and spoke with assurance of Russian support; those in the opposition took what comfort they could from British and American actions and speeches but could not claim unqualified aid.

The splitting up of the village into Communists and non-Communists had therefore caused a tear in the total social fabric. For example, children who belonged to the Fatherland Front organization —the *Septemvriche*—received many small favors from the state. Little *Septemvristi* were sent to conferences within Bulgaria and even to Yugoslavia where they performed for their neighbor Slavs. Children who did not belong because their parents disapproved were taunted

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by the others. They answered back, repeating many of the comments heard around the house, comments definitely unfavorable to Communism and its cause. So the bickering reached into the schoolhouse and the playground, and children early became conscious of political differences not of their own making.

With the young people, as already indicated, the division on the basis of political sympathy was even more marked. The Agrarian young people tended to associate with each other, and watched with dismay the active role that the members of the Communist youth group were playing in village life. Some enamoured couples, where each had differing political loyalties, disregarded political barriers in their devotion to each other, but when broaching the question of marriage to the parents often met stern disapproval. A girl's father would say, "I don't want my daughter marrying a Communist" or "You do what you want, but if you marry a Communist never come back to my house."

The controversy over politics extended also to the various "working groups" which had been such a basic part of village life in the past. A woman who was organizing a corn-hoeing group would invite only those whose political interests were similar. She knew that little work would be done in her fields if she got together women who differed over the present government.

At this stage of accommodation, therefore, factionalism was based on political differences and expressed itself in a separatism which seriously affected village life. People who differed politically simply stayed apart; where they had to mingle, such as on a bus, they made the best of it by teasing and horseplay which seemed to be all in fun but which often gave voice to deeply rooted emotions.

Accompanying the disagreements within the agricultural group itself were disagreements between the Agrarians and the artisans. The peasants of the opposition resented intensely the attempt on the part of the government to classify them with "workers," or men who owned little or no land and who depended entirely upon some skill for a livelihood. The peasant in the past had felt superior, or at least claimed to be more favored in social position than the artisan such as the tailor, although envious of the "easy work" that the tailor had to

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668 578 554 178 do. Owing to the Communistic agitation in Dragalevtsy, lines were more sharply drawn between the peasants on the one hand and the artisans on the other. Most of the artisans had learned their trade in Sofia, had been subjected to city influences, and many of them had become acquainted with Communist ideas there before the war. Even Bai Milosh, the village patriarch so frequently mentioned in this account, had a son who had become an ardent Communist. This son was not the one who took over the management of field crops, nor the one responsible for the livestock. Instead he had become a cobbler. He thought of himself as a worker, whereas his brothers thought of themselves as farmers.

668 578 178 [888] Quarreling between the young and old also characterized the factionalism. Although the Agrarian young people opposed the Communists, they were certainly influenced by the actions of their more progressive or radical contemporaries. The older peasants who were opposed to the present regime emphasized time and time again the danger of having young people run the affairs of the land. This displacement of the aged rather than the indifference of Communists to God seemed to be causing the gravest concern to those who had been steeped in the traditional way of life.

668 179 626 But factionalism was not the only pronounced change which I noted. I found everywhere an insecurity which was foreign to the Dragalevtsy I had once known. The opposition supporters could be expected to feel insecure, for they had to face the possibility that Communism would carry the day. But even the Communists who were definitely in the good graces of the party were having many troubled moments. The wife of one Communist was active in the opposition, and when I asked him why he tolerated such political division in his family he simply laughed. I continued to question him: "Aren't you the boss in this family? Why do you let your wife have such independence?"

He then became deadly serious and sought to lead me out of my cloud of ignorance. "You see, it's this way. Suppose the Communists are overthrown. Where would I be then? But if my wife is active in the Agrarian group, she can then speak for me and get me out of trouble."

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Furthermore, the *mahali* (plural form) differ in size and prestige as well as in location. If the fortunes of two or three homes in a *mahala* rise, then the prestige of that *mahala* rises too. Land values go up in that place and the choice residential sites tend to shift there. This is illustrated in the case of the Daneva *Mahala* where the Danev men because of shrewd business methods have been able to accumulate considerable capital. Just the reverse is true in *mahali* where the families are very poor.

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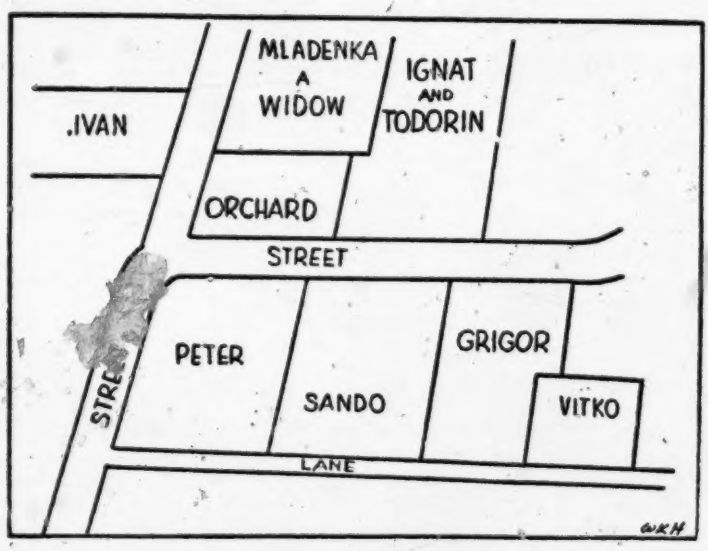
But the general use of the term *mahala* by the Dragalevtsy villagers is that applied to the smaller neighborhood of from seven to twelve houses. This use will be best understood if we briefly consider one of the village *mahali*: for instance, the Stoiova *Mahala* which consists of eight families living in the following spatial relationships and identified by the names of the family head as follows:



THE STOIOVA MAHALA*

Seven family heads are men, one is a woman.

Ignat and Todorin live with their families in separate divisions of the same house.

The kinship nature of the *mahala* is shown by the fact that Ignat and Sando are brothers and are nephews of Peter, and uncles of Todorin. They

* Subsequent investigation showed this *mahala* to be representative of others in the village.

[Cf p. 231, category 116.. Analyst]

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TABLE 11

INTERACTION BETWEEN FAMILY HEADS OF STOIOVA MAHALA, DRAGALEVTSY, SUMMER OF 1937

(Positive Interaction, +; Negative, —; Neutral or None, O)

GIVEN NAMES OF HEADS	MLADENKA	IGNAT	PETER	SANDO	GRIGOR	VITKO	TODORIN	IVAN
1. Mladenka,* a widow		+	—	O	—	—	O	—
2. Ignat, a "peacemaker"	+		—	O	+	O	+	+
3. Peter, an elderly man	—	—		—	O	+	—	+
4. Sando, bro. of 2	O	O	—		+	O	+	+
5. Grigor, an outsider	—	+	O	+		—	O	O
6. Vitko, now retired	—	O	+	O	—		O	O
7. Todorin, nephew of 2, 4	O	+	—	+	O	O		O
8. Ivan, a landlord	—	+	+	+	O	O	O	

* The predominance of conflict in Mladenka's relationships may be attributed to the fact that she is a woman and thus at a decided disadvantage. The peasants think of Bulgaria as still being a "man's country," and so it is.

are very distant cousins of Vitko and of Grigor's wife who persuaded Grigor, an outsider, to move to Dragalevtsy. Mladenka moved in from another *mahala,* while Ivan came from some other part of Bulgaria. Further light is thrown on the nature of the *mahala* by an analysis of the interaction between the family heads of the Stoiova *Mahala* as shown in table 11. The positive interaction[4] took such forms:

Ignat plowed Mladenka's garden plot for her and received in return permission to keep his sheep in her yard during the winter.

[4] I made no attempt to work out a complicated classification of social interaction with these simple, peasant folk. I soon learned that a rule-of-the-thumb method *similarly* applied in each case got results which checked with my own observation as well as that of the best informed people in the village. Eliminating from consideration here assimilation, competition, and accommodation I used merely the concepts of co-operation (Positive interaction) and conflict (Negative interaction). Where there is little trace of either positive or negative interaction I used the term Neutral. My description is based on the following questions: Which of the family heads co-operate regularly? Examples. Which have difficulties or quarrel more than they co-operate? Examples. Which have little to do with each other? Why?

The examples presented by the villagers to justify their statements were common knowledge in the whole neighborhood. Therefore, I was little surprised to find that once I had tentatively jotted down the prevailing interaction as given by the first informant every subsequent interview confirmed it. It is the case of anybody's business being everybody's business. Indeed, there is little doubt in the "public's mind" as to the relationship between any two people. I even suspect that two people wanting to better their relationship, for instance, would find the public a handicap due to the fixed conception of their respective roles.

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Families of Ignat and Grigor work together in the field and at home throughout the year. Their children are of similar ages.

Sando and Ignat draw wood from the mountain for Ivan and in return borrow money from him occasionally.

Peter and Ivan, both elderly men, are drawn together by common interests.

Negative interaction can be illustrated as follows:

Peter's dog attacked Mladenka's sow which was about to bear young. As a result the litter was stillborn. Mladenka unsuccessfully tried to recover damages from Peter. Now she says of Peter: "He only speaks to me between his teeth."

A quarrel between Mladenka's daughter and Vitko's daughter, formerly the best of friends, over the question of employment as a domestic.

Mladenka is engaged in a lawsuit with Ivan over the question of property. The dispute arose when a new street was constructed between their houses.

Grigor quarrels with Vitko, and Ignat; Sando, and Todorin quarrel with Peter over land.

A count of the bonds between the family heads shows that the three categories are approximately equal in number: Positive—nine; Negative—eight; Neutral—eleven. Of course, we have not attempted to analyze bonds between the wives of the family heads, but we can be sure that if two men are in a quarrel they will forbid their wives to associate with members of the other's family.

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In other parts of Bulgaria I have found that the word *mahala* has a slightly different significance and is used to describe some large section of the village which is separated because of such physical limitations as a river or a hill.[8] This means that other places would not have the twenty-two *mahali* which we find in Dragalevtsy. However, the Dragalevtsy people themselves use this broader term to describe an industrial community which is springing up between the village and Sofia and which has been assigned to the Dragalevtsy commune. Whenever any resident from there comes to Dragalevtsy to pay

[8] "The *mahala* (Dorfviertelschaft) is an enlarged neighborhood, which is usually determined by the physical features of the village. A river, a hill, or a strip of woods divides the village into two or more parts, localities, 'house complexes,' even *mahali*. If, however, there are no geographical lines of demarcation, 'calling-distance' determines the extent of the individual 'house complexes.' If two inhabitants of separate or distant 'house complexes' greet each other, each speaks when the conversation turns upon it of his *mahala* as of something individual and independent, distinct from the others. To each his *mahala* is a sort of miniature *Heimat*. Every man in the whole village is identified first as a native of his *mahala*, then as a member of his neighborhood, finally as a native of his own home. Neighborhood, *mahala*, and village are three gradually increasing entities, of which only the last two exhibit outwardly defined boundaries." (Wasil Handjieff: *Zur Soziologie des Bulgarischen Dorfes*, pp. 35-36.) Also see Note 3 in this connection.

Soviet groove. Secondly, Bulgaria is highly important to Russia strategically. She flanks enemy Jugoslavia. She provides the only direct approach to Greece since Tito has closed the main route. She adjoins Turkey, on whom the Soviets desire to exert pressure from all directions. She is, as we have seen, Russia's chosen instrument of intervention in the Macedonian question. On every count she is the country which, more directly than any other except Poland, can be useful to Russia in the present line-up of European forces. It is not by chance that she and Poland had the honor of being the first to receive high officers of the Soviet Army as commanders-in-chief of their troops.

The sources of opposition are two. One is nationalism. It may be called Titoism or Kostovism, but it is always treason. Nationalists are dealt with as Petkov and Kostov were dealt with. These two, such poles apart, are simply conspicuous examples among tens of thousands who have suffered for opposing the Communization or Sovietization of their country. Any successors they may have, whether noble like Petkov or hateful like Kostov, will be put down with the same irresistible brutality.

The other source of opposition is the peasantry. The peasants resist being made into sharecroppers. They do not think that they are being forced into collectives so that a great social goal can be achieved but in order that a group of adventurers can exploit their hold on them and on the country more conveniently. The Communists are everything that peasants hate and fear—the city slicker, the government bureaucrat. These newcomers in the villages, wearing city clothes, often speaking with a foreign accent, urge the peasants to enter collectives for their own good. Those who do are only one degree better off than those who do not—they are allowed to live, while those who refuse starve. But they live as serfs. They will work for the rest of their lives, as they figure it, to support others who will not or cannot work so hard as they must do—other peasants who have let their lands run down and are glad to merge with those who have kept theirs up, and surplus townsfolk who will never learn to "pay their way." That there are other answers to such arguments than force does not matter. The answer has been given, and it is force.

[i.e. Opposition to Sovietization---Analyst]